Help Desk

*By Kevin Savetz**

Q I can access the file archives of an FTP site using FTP, Gopher, and the World Wide Web. Is it better or more efficient to download files using one method over the others?

A Once upon a time, if you wanted to copy files from one place on the Internet to another, there was only one tool you could use: FTP (file transfer protocol). Although FTP is still in wide use, today the Internet's file archives are increasingly available via other tools as well, including Gopher and the Web. From your standpoint, it doesn't matter much which method you use: each tool does the job of connecting to a remote site and transferring files to your computer.

However, looking at the bigger picture, Gopher and the Web are preferable to FTP for transferring files. If the file archives you wish to access are available via Gopher or the Web, you can be a good Net citizen by accessing the archives using one of those instead of FTP. You see, FTP requires a constant connection from your computer to another site—you're utilizing a little bit of that system from the time when you "open" the connection to until you type "quit." Gopher and the Web make more efficient use of connection time, by quickly connecting to a site, grabbing the necessary information, and disconnecting. These "quick hits" use less system resources and mean that more users can access a site simultaneously. On the other hand, the Web, at least, uses more bandwidth than older "protocols."

Many FTP sites set a limit on the number of users who may access the site at once. If you've tried FTPing in the middle of the day, you've undoubtedly seen a message like "too many connections—try again later." Sometimes you'll be offered a list of alternative sites. You're much less likely to be annoyed by that message if you use Gopher to access archive sites—since they use fewer system resources and connections are shorter, Gopher sessions are generally more available.

Q When I use Veronica to see what's available on a certain subject on a Gopher server, what's the difference between "searching Gopherspace" and "searching Gopher menus"? Also, what's the difference between Jughead and Veronica? Which should I use?

A Gopher is an easy-to-use, menu-driven Internet tool. It was the first program to make navigating the Internet truly easy for nontechnical users: rather than having to telnet or FTP to dozens of different sites in search of information (and recall all of those hard-to-remember site names), Gopher lets you pick items from menus, without making you think about where you're connected. Gopherspace—the vast information available in many formats, around the world via Gopher—is an enormous resource. However, even the finest libraries are useless without a method of indexing their contents: Veronica and Jughead are two tools that work as Gopherspace indexers.

Originally, Jughead was designed to index a single Gopher server. For instance, a university's system administrator might have used Jughead to make an index of all the articles in that university's Gopher server. Veronica was meant to index all of Gopherspace. Those definitions are less true today, since most Jughead servers index all of Gopherspace, and Veronica servers can be tweaked to search only a single Gopher site. There are other technical differences, but it all boils down to this: Veronica (which stands for the unlikely acronym Very Easy Rodent-Oriented Netwide Index to Computerized archives) and Jughead (which stands for Jonzy's Universal Gopher Hierarchy Excavation And Display) are similar tools. Today, Veronica is much more common.

While searching Gopherspace with Veronica, you often must choose between two sorts of searches: "Search Gopherspace by keywords in Titles" and "Search Gopher directories for keywords in Titles." The former searches everything in Gopherspace—menu names *and* the titles of resources available within menus. These gopherspace resources may be any type of data, including ASCII text, image files, links to telnet sites, and binary files. "Search Gopher directories" is a more limited search, which will find only Gopher directories (menu items) whose titles contain your keywords. This latter type of search can be useful in locating major holdings of information related to your subject *if* they're intuitively worded. After Veronica finds the Gopher directories and presents them to you in the form of another Gopher menu, you can open any of them to see the contents in more detail.

Remember that both Veronica and Jughead find resources by searching for specific words in document titles (the name of the resource as it appears on the menu of its home Gopher server). They do not do a full-text search of the contents of documents. ◆

The Help Desk is a regular feature of this newsletter. Questions are answered by Kevin Savetz, a contributing editor of the* Guide *and author of* Your Internet Consultant *(SAMS, 1994). You can submit questions care of David Peal, at (202) 739-9541 or* **dpeal@ix.netcom.com.

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